Creating a Pretext for Waging "Humanitarian Wars"

By Kevin Skerrett

Canada has used its intervention in Haiti, and the bombing and occupation of Afghanistan, as positive illustrations of the doctrine now known as "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P).

For some, this concept is merely an update of the racist "white man's burden"—the notion that wealthy, militarily-powerful countries have an obligation to "protect" the populations of poorer countries that are unable to protect (or govern) themselves.

Canada's Haiti policy also shows us how deeply-set, racist perceptions of other (non-white) countries can be effectively mobilized to advance this concept. The established view of Haiti's (formerly enslaved, extremely poor, African) population—as "incapable of self-government"—was renewed and refreshed.

When *Ottawa Citizen* columnist David Warren lamented on the eve of the coup that Haiti had failed to create "a people who are susceptible to self-government," it elicited no particular notice. His racism was echoed by Liberal MP Beth Phinney, who asked in a Foreign Affairs committee hearing (June 14, 2004): "How can you change the will of the people [of Haiti] to want to be able to govern themselves?"

Such repugnant views require total ignorance of Haiti's history. Haiti`s people liberated themselves from slavery, occupation and dictatorship, and then managed to democratically elect a president (three times!) that the U.S. government overtly opposed.

If the people of Haiti have proven one thing in their tragic history, it is their burning desire—and their capacity—to "govern themselves."

But of course, this is the threat that the coup in Haiti ended, and that the R2P doctrine is designed to counter. And, with the concept now "field-tested," it is ready to serve usefully in the future should the need to violate another country's sovereignty (or support the violations carried out by an "ally") arise again.

Source: "Haiti is 'fixed,'" *New Socialist*, Dec. 1, 2005.

The Canadian government created the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty and spearheaded its "responsibility to protect" doctrine. Thanks to Canada's initiative, this precept is now used to justify and legitimize illegal wars under the guise of "humanitarian interventions" even if —as was the case in Haiti—they have democratically-elected governments. The major powers have replaced their supposed "right" to invade, occupy and impose regime change with the much more palatable moral "responsibility to protect" any country they deem to be a "failed state."

Freedom / Strength / War is Peace / Ignorance / Slavery / 1984 George Orwell
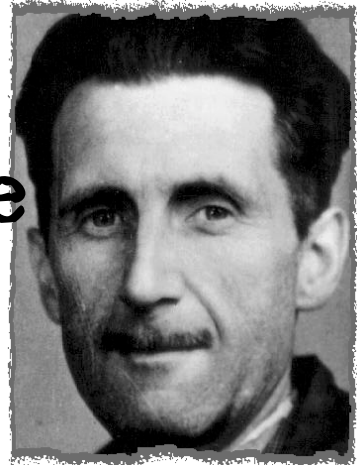
Will the Real "Failed States" Please Stand Up?

By Anthony Fenton

According to then-Prime Minister Paul Martin, Canada's involvement in Haiti was the "morally responsible" thing to do. He has also said that Haiti was a "failed state," that Canada and other "friends of Haiti" intervened at just the right time to restore peace and stability.

In July 2004, Martin addressed what the *Globe and Mail* called an "exclusive gathering" of "media moguls" in Idaho. The transcript of Martin's speech noted the following about Haiti:

> "Just as companies have to improve governance, so do countries. Better governance within fragile, failing or failed states means building effective public institutions. It is true that fragile states often require military intervention to restore stability…. We saw this in Haiti. Almost ten years ago Canada, the U.S. and some other countries intervened... The problem is that none of us... stayed long enough nor did we take the time and effort...to build these institutions. So ten years later, here we are, back with the same problem and the same mess, but this time, we have to stay until the job is done properly."

Source: "Canada in Haiti: Who Engineered the Overthrow of Democracy?" *The Dominion*, Aug. 25, 2004.

Securing Our "Failed States" Together

"America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones.... We must defeat these threats to our nation, allies and friends."
U.S. National Security Strategy, Sept. 2002.

"[We will] leverage Canada's experience in building peace, order and good government to help developing, failed and failing states."
Canada's National Security Policy, April 27, 2004.

R2P: Typecasting Canada as Hero in Theatres of War

By Richard Sanders

The so-called "Responsibility-to-Protect" (R2P) doctrine was used as an ideological pretext to justify and legitimize the military invasion, regime change and UN-sanctioned occupation of Haiti.

For this, Canada has a lot to answer for. Canada is widely recognized as "the principal architect and advocate of the 'responsibility to protect.'"[1] It was, afterall, thanks to the Canadian government that this doctrine was institutionalised at the international level by a creature called the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS).

Cowboy neo-Cons and neo-Libs wage war of words

"The buzzwords to watch for are 'failed states,' 'responsibility to protect,' and the timeless rationalization of 'humanitarian intervention.' From Afghanistan to Haiti, the high-sounding proclamations of this liberal interventionism are coming to more closely mirror the foreign policy aims outlined by the cowboy neo-conservatives to the south."
Derrick O'Keefe

The ICISS was the brain-child of then-Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, who announced its conception in early September 2000.[2] Its birth was formally announced a week later by then-Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy, who thanked the "Carnegie, MacArthur and Rockefeller Foundations" for "strong political and financial support." Then, without any apparent conscious irony, he said these billionaire-funded organizations "are known for their leadership and vision."[3]

The Canadian government's parenting role for the ICISS did not end there. Two of its five meetings were held in Canada,[4] Axworthy chaired its advisory board[5] and its offices were located in Ottawa's Department of Foreign Affairs' building.[6] Canada also chose both ICISS co-chairs and helped select its ten commissioners.[7] Canada, represented by Michael Ignatieff and Gisèle Côté-Harper,[8] was the only country with more than one commissioner. (If you count that "Big L" Liberal Ignatieff, the longtime U.S. resident and supporter of George Bush, missile defense, the Iraq war and torture, as a Canadian.)

The R2P doctrine, which Canada so-proudly fostered, directly contradicts the UN's primary principles of sovereignty and military non-intervention. It spells out excuses for violating these longstanding precepts of the UN.

So, why would Canada, a nation widely perceived as a strong UN advocate, spearhead the creation of the ICISS with its R2P agenda? Shouldn't we have expected the U.S. or Britain—not Canada—to have spawned such an offspring? These, afterall, are the state actors which so often use humanitarian excuses to mask their imperial intentions in scattered theatres of war.

In May 2004—soon after Canadian government efforts reached fruition in the brutal regime change that ousted Haiti's democratically-elected government—then-Prime Minister Paul Martin asked an important question. First, using Made-in-Canada rhetoric he summarized R2P saying: "Failed states more often than not require military intervention in order to ensure stability."[9] Then, he posed the question: "So why is it up to Canada to be the catalyst?" His answer is telling:

> "We inspire confidence not only because we are a large industrialized nation, but also because *we are neither a former colonial power nor a superpower*."[10] (emphasis added)

Can you imagine the snickering if a "superpower" or "former colonial power" had stepped forward as "catalyst" for the R2P opus? Picture the U.S. or Britain leading the global charge to use respect for peace and democracy as a justification for launching military invasions and regime changes. If Bush or Blair had starred in this drama, the whole production would been have laughed off the global stage as a ridiculous farce.

But Canada was perfect for the part. Our government has carefully crafted the image of a fair and peaceable actor, untainted by roles in imperial war. This guise, of course, flies in the face of reality. Canada's reputation as the honest broker, unpretentious peacemonger and reluctant warrior, is a convenient false front which is dearly valued by our closest political, economic and military allies.

Others in our troupe were delighted to have Canada take the starring role on R2P. They needed an actor who could invoke just the right image. Canada was the perfect stand-in because for so many seasons it has been typecast as the heroic peacemaker.

But how much longer will Canada be able to play such chivalrous parts? When will fans see through this thinly-veiled disguise? Will global audiences wise up enough to throw tomatoes not roses, when Canada arrogantly bows for applause after a carefully-rehearsed humanitarian war is dutifully performed in service to empire?

IDEOLOGY

Although peace activists are less susceptible to the deceptive arts of political theatre, we are not immune from their powerful influence. Even well-meaning activists are swayed to support the violent plays of empire if enough noble-sounding soliloquies and emotionally-charged spectacles are heeded. In coming years, anti-war activists will have to be increasingly wary of grandstanding politicians and other thespians whose lines, drawn from the R2P script, are used as cover in economic and military power plays.

By assuming the metaphorical role of theatre critics, activists can perhaps expose the R2P storyboard before the elite's trusty playwrights can reuse it as a template to create future wars.

As independent journalist Derrick O'Keefe has said

"The buzzwords to watch for are 'failed states,' 'responsibility to protect,' and the timeless rationalization of 'humanitarian intervention.' From Afghanistan to Haiti, the high-sounding proclamations of this liberal interventionism are coming to more closely mirror the foreign policy aims outlined by the cowboy neo-conservatives to the south. Maybe Martin's new strident pose will help some lose their illusions in Canadian neutrality and benevolence, specifically with respect to the occupation of Iraq where, as the PM says 'we're certainly doing our share.'"[11]

References

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Historical Antecedents of Canada's "Responsibility-to-Protect" Doctrine

The White Man's Burden

This poem, written by Rudyard Kipling in 1899, was used to justify the America's imperialist war for Spanish colonies (like Cuba and the Philippines) as if it were a noble and righteous cause.

Take up the White Man's burden--
Send forth the best ye breed--
Go, bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait, in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild--
Your new-caught sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child.

Take up the White Man's burden--
In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain,
To seek another's profit
And work another's gain.

Take up the White Man's burden--
The savage wars of peace--
Fill full the mouth of Famine,
And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
(The end for others sought)
Watch sloth and heathen folly
Bring all your hope to nought.

"Compulsory Government" for "Lower Races"

The 'responsibility to protect' is an official reformalization of imperialism, a new way to state what in 1902 John Hobson described as "trusteeship" to manage the "lower races":

"The real issue is whether, and under what circumstances, it is justifiable for Western nations to use compulsory government for the control and education in the arts of industrial and political civilization of the inhabitants of tropical countries and other so-called lower races."

Hobson was thinking of Haiti when pontificating about efficient and justifiable means to subjugate peoples deemed inferior to the white race:

"If we look to the native social systems of the tropical East, the primitive savagery of Central Africa...or the black republic of Hayti...the lesson seems the same; it is that there will be no development of the resources of the tropics under native government." (Cited in Philip Curtin, *Imperialism*, p. 319-337.)

Source: Anthony Fenton, "KLA helps establish 'Protectorate' in Haiti," *Global Research*, Nov. 21, 2004. <www.globalresearch.ca>